

## Qualitative Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Assisted Education Policy of Ethekwini Metropolitan Municipality

Prof. Mpilo Ngubane\*

*Adjunct Professor of Research at UNISA-SBL, Doctor of Administration from University of Durban-Westville and Doctor of Public Administration from University of Zululand, South Africa*

*\*Corresponding Author: Mpilo Ngubane, Independent Researcher, Doctor of Administration from University of Durban-Westville and Doctor of Public Administration from University of Zululand, South Africa*

### ABSTRACT

*The technological, social, environmental, economic, political and other global changes continuously demand agile workforce that does not only comprehend these changes but are also able to keep up with the speed of rapid change. Workplaces are equally affected by these changes and this has created certain values, attitudes and expectations for the workforce. These changes demand that employees should be highly skilled, professional and ethical. Development of employees therefore becomes a sine qua non for employees to cope with these global changes.*

*Municipalities experience the same global changes therefore development of municipal employees becomes sacrosanct. eThekweni Municipality has recently developed an Assisted Education Policy to develop its employees to be able to keep up with all of these transformative global changes. It therefore becomes imperative to constantly evaluate effectiveness of this Policy.*

**Keywords:** *Assisted Education, Learning and Development, Development, Knowledge Workers, Employee Retention, Retention Strategies, Employee Benefits, Employee Satisfaction.*

### INTRODUCTION

The 21st century world of work has changed dramatically obviously facilitated by a lot of factors such as technological, social, political, environmental and other global factors at large. When the nature of work changes, and so are the elements which are necessary to manage different transformations such as workforce demographics, awareness of social and environmental corporate responsibility which are taking place (Tladi, 2015). Some of the contributing factors to these changes are globalization and technology.

Where and how people work, as well as workforce expectations (Schabracq & Cooper, 2000; Burke & Ng, 2006; Konz & Ryan, 1999 and Nayar, 2012). These changes result into changed or different employees with different attitudes, values and expectations from employers. Workplaces have changed from being areas of general economic and social activity to being places where employees are seeking meaning, value, support, recognition and purpose to their lives. It is not only money or salaries that drive employees to work but a

whole lot of other incentives. In light of the transformation which is taking place in the workplace, it is evident that financial rewards and or financial incentives are not sufficient as sole retention strategies, there are other factors which need to be considered to drive and support organizations as they go through these changes.

Changes in the workplace also demand highly skilled and highly professional employees with agility and integrity. It is for this reason that most organizations invest a lot of money on the training and development of employees in order to remain globally competitive and relevant. Most of the writers agree that employee training is a complicated human resource practice that can expressively influence the accomplishment of the organizational objectives (Jehanzeb & Bashir, 2013).

Development of employees enables them not only to gain new skills and abilities, but to literally improve the organizational efficiency or effectiveness. Training is therefore described by Goldstein & Ford (2002) as an organized method of learning and development which

expands the efficiency of individual, group and the organization.

Municipalities are not an exception to the norm when it comes to training or learning and development. They equally experience the same global challenges that require them to be run like businesses.

They have to be equally competitive to attract tourists and investors so as to be financially and economically viable. They are in the coalface of service-delivery and they experience public protests on regular basis because of the lack of basic services. It is therefore imperative that municipalities should develop their employees to be competitive and also to deliver services effectively.

It is for these reasons that eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality has revamped and renamed its Bursary Policy to be Assisted Education Policy to provide for a wider and broader development of its employees.

### **AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Assisted Education Policy of eThekweni Municipality. The objectives of the study were to establish:

- The reasons for respondents to apply for assisted education programme.
- The current support that the municipality provides to students (respondents) who are beneficiaries of the assisted education programme.
- The support students (respondents) recommend should be offered by the municipality.
- Successes of the assisted education programme.
- Gaps in the Assisted Education Policy.
- Organizational barriers affecting the implementation of the Assisted Education Policy.
- Recommended solutions to the barriers.
- Provisions of the Policy that promote retention of employees.
- Recommended improvement of the Policy.
- Recommended culture to promote learning and development in the municipality.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **The Changing Work Place**

In the past, organizations worried much about their performance, whether is products or service delivery and therefore performance became the bottom-line measured throughout the achievement of particular set objectives. These days organizations are now accountable for the effects on the physical, ecological and social environments in which they operate – the “triple bottom line” (Slaper & Hall, 2011). There are many factors that have contributed to the change of the workplace. Apart from the environmental, social, economic, political factors, etc, the nature of work has also been redefined by the global convergence of technology and the resultant changes in knowledge management practices (Horwilz, 2003). Covid-19 pandemic has also literally forced many organizations into using modern technology thus fast-tracking the implementation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

Municipalities have also adapted to and quickly embraced the 4IR and some like eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality have even developed Smart City Strategies. At the heart of these Smart City Strategies, is the drive to transcend the structures, systems, processes, and services to be technologically savvy. This therefore calls for development in technology of councillors, employees and even communities who are recipients of services.

#### **Knowledge Workers**

The technological world of work relies on knowledge production and management and for employees to be relevant and adapt to the ever changing world of technology, they need to be knowledge workers.

A knowledge worker is any employee possessing specialist knowledge or know-how who continuously improves his or her skills in the area of work to improve efficiencies and deliver better. Knowledge workers also use knowledge for proper decision-making processes and they value the significance of (new) knowledge in the organization and thus forever look for new knowledge in their areas of operation.

Knowledge workers have expectations in terms of their career development and according to

Lee-Kelly, Blackman & Hurst (2007) they have the following attributes:

- Their careers turn to be directed through self-directed learning and further education rather than from internal career or personal development schemes.
- Their ability to learn lends itself to them developing their own personal competitive advantage.
- They are more likely to be loyal to fellow professionals, contact networks and peers rather than to their employers.
- They plan to resign after a period of time and are confident of finding alternative employment.
- They have a tendency to change employers often.
- They are motivated more by the intrinsic challenge of the work rather than financial rewards.

It is for these reasons that such workers (knowledge workers) are to be retained in organizations for they become such a valuable asset.

<b>EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES</b>			
<b>WHY EMPLOYEES ARE ATTRACTED TO ORGANISATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job Content</li> <li>• Career opportunities</li> <li>• Skills Development</li> <li>• Organisation's Reputation</li> <li>• Financial Rewards</li> </ul>	<b>WHY EMPLOYEES LEAVE ORGANISATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor Management/Leadership</li> <li>• Non-stimulating work</li> <li>• Feeling unappreciated</li> <li>• Lack of development</li> <li>• Frequent restructuring</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 1.** Retention Strategies (Kreisman, 2002)

Skills development and lack of development feature very prominently as reasons employees are attracted to and leave organisations respectively. There are other challenges that impact on retention such as opportunities for growth, existence of challenging and meaningful work, managerial integrity, level of fraud and corruption, empowerment of employees, incentive schemes, etc.

The motivational variables which were found to have significantly influenced employees in both public and private sector organisations are training and development, challenging /interesting work, freedom for innovative thinking and job security (Samuel & Chipunza, 2009). It is important to note that whilst retaining employees,

**EMPLOYEE RETENTION STRATEGIES**

Employee retention is defined as a process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organisation for the maximum period of time (James & Mathew, 2012). There are many reasons why employees are attracted to and leave organisations. The following are the reasons as cited by Kreisman (2002):

**Why employees are attracted to organisations**

- Type of work (Job Content)
- Career opportunities
- Skills development
- Company Reputation
- Potential for significant financial reward

**Why employees leave organisations:**

- Poor management/leadership
- Inability to see core skills (type of work not stimulating/challenging)
- Feeling unappreciated, not valued
- Lack of development, no career opportunities
- Frequent organisational restructuring

organisations retain knowledge, therefore retention of knowledge workers becomes paramount.

**Training and Development Programmes**

Different organisations provide training and development programmes to their employees for purposes of improving their skills and abilities. However, as times evolve, it is proven that globalisation of work has led to more reasons for organisations to invest in other skills such as technological, environmental, ecological, social, political skills, etc.

When employees increase technical knowledge of the job, they become more productive. Modern organisations have built up different

programmes for the training and development of their employees and these include tuition reimbursement packages so that they can improve their knowledge and education (Johanzeb & Bashir, 2013).

### Components of Training and Development Programmes

There are currently many training programmes for development of employees, and it is difficult to specify which method or programme is better than the other. Training programmes that focus on the wholistic development of all employees in all aspects and at all levels are gaining traction. Modern organisations (including academic institutions) deliver their training programmes through the use of Information Technology systems.

It therefore becomes paramount that organisations' technology systems are regularly updated to support development of employees. When developing their employees wholistically, public institutions such as municipalities need to ensure that councillors, staff and union representatives are developed equally to improve their participation in processes of the organisation.

Development of councilors helps them play their oversight effectively and that leads to more prudent and progressive decision-making processes. Similarly, when union leadership is developed on labour issues and general human resources, they are likely to find each other with management and that inevitably reduces disruptions of work and unnecessary confrontations. Whilst it is important to develop management and the practice has been dominant over years, it is time now that organisations should embark on a "bottom-up" approach where focus of development is on the lower-level employees who are the interface between the organisation and its customers.

## EMPLOYEE BENEFITS FROM DEVELOPMENT

### Careers competencies

Employees learn the soft and technical skills that are required by their jobs through training and development programmes (Jahanzeb & Bashir, 2013). Apart from the financial incentives that come with promotions after acquisitions of new knowledge, employees are aware that if they learn and develop continuously, they are investing in knowledge for the future and will be able to survive any future eventualities such as job losses, retrenchments, etc. Some professions also continue to demand continuous learning and development of its members through attainment of continuous professional development points which allow continuous employment of employees in those professions. Employees therefore value this kind of development because it guarantees them continuous employment in their professions. Some organisations have set-up hourly targets for employees to spend on training and development before they are promoted to management positions.

### Employee Satisfaction

When employees are given opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge, they are likely to be more satisfied with their jobs. Many organisations invest in training and developing their employees because they know that it will eventually benefit the whole organisation. Companies which are providing training and development programmes for their employees are achieving high level of employee satisfaction and low employee turnover (Wagner, 2000). Training increases organisations' reliability for the reason that employees recognise their organisations' spending in their future career (Rosewarld, 2000).

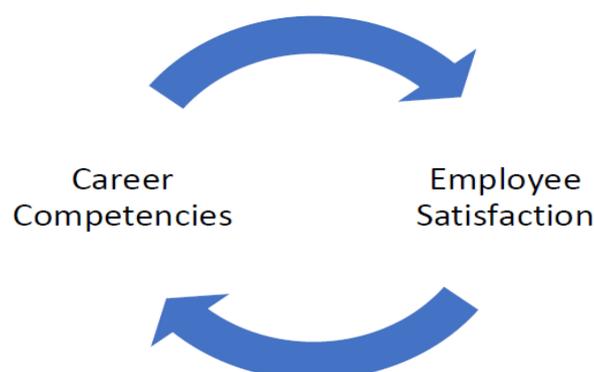


FIGURE2. Employee Benefits from Development

## **LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **Local Government Municipal Systems Act, 2000**

Section 67(1) provides that a municipality, in accordance with applicable law and subject to any applicable collective agreement, must develop and adopt appropriate systems and procedures, consistent with any uniform standards prescribed in terms of section 72(1)(c), to ensure fair, efficient, effective and transparent personnel administration, including-

*The recruitment, selection and appointment of persons as staff members,*

*The supervision and management of staff,*

*The monitoring, measuring and evaluating of performance of staff.*

It should be noted that once employees are employed, they need to be developed continuously to be able to perform effectively, therefore it becomes the responsibility of management, as part of their management duties, to ensure that employees are developed.

Section 68(1) provides that a municipality must develop its human resource capacity to a level that enables it to perform its functions and exercise its powers in an economical, effective, efficient and accountable way, and for this purpose must comply with the Skills Development Act, 1998 and the Skills Development Levies Act of 1999.

Section 68(2) provides that a municipality may in addition to any provision for a training levy in terms of the Skills Development Levies Act, 1999, make provision in its budget for the development of and implementation of training programmes.

Section 68(3) provides that a municipality which does not have the financial means to provide funds for training programmes in addition to the levy payable in terms of the Skills Development Levies Act, 1999, may apply to the Sector Education and Training Authority (Seta) for local government established in terms of the Skills Development Act, 1998, for such funds.

South African local government is not short of enabling legislation when it comes to skills development. There is even provision for funding from the local government Setra if a

municipality is unable to fund its own skills and development programme.

### **Skills Development Act, 1998**

The objects of the Skills Development Act of 1998 are to:

- Provide an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce;
- Integrate those strategies within the National Qualifications Framework contemplated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995;
- Provide for learnerships that lead to recognised occupational qualifications;
- Provide for the financing of skills development by means of a levy-grant scheme and a National Skills Fund;
- Provide for and regulate employment services; and
- Provide for matters connected therewith.

The Skills Development Act of 1998 helps municipalities to develop strategies, processes, systems and alternative funding for the implementation of skills development programmes. This therefore means that municipalities are empowered to provide skills programmes and it therefore remains a question why some municipalities are failing to develop their employees.

## **ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY ASSISTED EDUCATION POLICY**

The employee's Assisted Education Policy (2018) of eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality's purpose is to promote the principle of life-long learning, by encouraging employees to take responsibility for their own education and skills development (supported by the municipality) where this will add value to their performance towards the achievements of the municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP), its strategic objectives.

### **Principles**

Principles determining education courses of study under this Policy are that:

- They are identified by the employee and employer as being able to assist his or her

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performance in his or her existing post, or career prospects within the municipality;

- They are predominantly provided by institutions of higher learning in South Africa;
- They are generally of 12 months or more in duration; and
- They are predominantly conducted, or require self-study, in the employee's own time (not during working hours unless the programme is only available during the day).

### Scope

Development under this Policy is:

- Available to all permanent employees (subject to having completed 1 year of performance and assessment being done);
- Available to employees who have not completed 1 year of performance provided that such employees were receiving financial assistance from their previous employers.

### Prioritization

The approval of applications for Assisted Education are prioritized in the following order:

- Where there is a legislative requirement for the applicant to possess the intended qualification in his or her current position;
- Where the intended qualification will satisfy critical skills shortage in the municipality;
- Where the intended qualification is addressing the Employment Equity or Talent Management requirements;
- Where the intended qualification is up to or including National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 4 qualification or matriculation;
- Where the applicant is not yet in possession of any other tertiary qualification;
- Where the intended qualification is applicable to the required or preferred requirements stipulated in the duty schedule of the applicant's existing post;
- Where the applicant is a shop-steward and the application is relevant to labour functions;
- Where the qualification is a second qualification;

- Where the application is for a Master's Degree; and
- Where the application is for a Doctoral Degree

The Policy provides for work back of obligatory service equivalent to a period for which assistance was received, effective from the submission of results after successful completion of the first-year programme. This effectively means that in a 3-year qualification, the service obligation starts when an employee is doing the second year but serving for the previous year and concurrently with the studies such that when he or she finishes the qualification, she will only serve one year post-qualification, however an employee who resigns before serving this obligatory 1 year needs to pay back the money.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative in nature and used questionnaires that were administered to a sample of 50 employees who are currently supported by the municipality through its Assisted Education Programme. These are the employees who are currently studying towards various qualifications in various academic institutions. It should be pointed out that the Assisted Education Programme does not discriminate according to employment levels or seniority, all employees are eligible to study, and any employee can apply and be accepted depending largely on the availability of budget and the relevance of the qualification to the functions of the municipality. The following are some of the reasons why questionnaires were used:

- They are more practical and a quicker way of getting results: The researcher had a specific time-frame to finish the research project and there was no time to make appointments with each of the respondents.
- They are scalable to a larger audience: The total number of respondents was 50 therefore it became easy to get to all of them and 48 respondents returned questionnaires.
- They enable easier comparability: It was easier to make comparisons of all responses.
- They create actionability of analysed data: Recommendations made are easily converted into actions and that becomes beneficial to the municipality when reviewing the Policy.

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- They maintain anonymity: Some respondents would not want to be seen to be openly criticising the Policy because of fear of victimisation.

It should also be noted that most of the questions were open-ended to elicit objective information such as their recommendations on how the Policy can be improved.

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The following themes applied to the questions asked to respondents:

#### Theme 1: Reasons for applying for Assisted Education

Respondents were asked why they applied for Assisted Education and the following are some of their responses:

- To enable them to be eligible for promotion.
- To advance their thinking capacity and educational empowerment.
- To expand knowledge and career path.
- To benefit both personally and professionally.
- To cope with the studies financially.
- To equip themselves with academic knowledge in order to align with working experience.
- To position themselves for better opportunities in the organisation.
- To obtain a qualification to meet the requirements of the posts applied for.
- To further their studies.
- To improve knowledge and skills to apply them when doing work.
- To learn and study further.
- To get financial relief since education is expensive.
- To learn best practices to do the job better.
- To develop themselves and improve management skills.
- To gain a qualification to afford them opportunities to grow within Council.
- To improve career opportunities.
- To enhance work skills and improve performance.

The majority of respondents applied for assisted education for purposes of getting promotion at work or become employable and very few wanted to develop skills in their current jobs.

#### Theme 2: Current support from the municipality

Respondents were also asked how the municipality supports them and the following are some of their responses:

- The municipality pays for tuition fees.
- The programme assists them because they can work and study at the same time.
- The municipality has introduced a research class for Masters and PHD students (employees) and this helps in knowledge sharing.
- The municipality pays for time in lieu to study and write examinations.
- The municipality gives them study leave.
- Flexible work-back of hours used to attend block classes.

#### Theme 3: Recommended support by the municipality

The following are some of the recommendations for additional support by the municipality:

- To cover costs of study material such as books and study guides.
- To consider a 2-days study leave (instead of 1 day before the exam).
- To have a small library stock for reference purposes.
- To develop sets of topics for employees to research on so that the municipality derives full benefits for supporting studies.
- To open reasonable time to attend classes.
- To pay for stationery, data, lap-tops, fuel and meals.
- To provide study venues.
- To provide an opportunity to gain practical experience of what has been studied.
- To offer flexible and remote working hours for those who are studying.
- To encourage management to focus on productivity rather than the number of hours worked.

#### **Theme 4: Successes of the Policy**

Respondents were also asked to cite the successes of the Assisted Education Policy. Respondent 1 (R1) stated, "It assists us to empower ourselves and in return the City will have employees that are skilled and will improve performance within the Department." R2 said, "The successes of the Assisted Education Policy are empowered human resources. The individuals that have been through the Assisted Education process are able to move up the corporate ladder and do more in the organisation. This is great achievement for those of us who have been previously disadvantaged or came from poor socio-economic conditions." R3 said, "The success is that it is giving staff the opportunity to afford further education and training. We are slowly becoming a learning organisation where staff realise the need to improve their knowledge and skills. This shows that we are now on a positive trajectory to improving. We are seeing fellow employees who are doing Doctorates operating at a different level and you aspire to learn from them." R6 stated, "It provides all of us with the opportunity to gain a qualification which makes us more knowledgeable and marketable." Another response by R8 linked assisted education with service delivery as follows: "Improved service delivery due to improved knowledge and skills provided through assisted education and professionalism demonstrated by employees." R19 stated, "Many of the participants (beneficiaries) of the Assisted Education Policy have progressed in their careers or have been promoted into new positions." Commenting on the calibre of employees who have gone through the assisted education programme, R11 stated, "Best quality employees are produced out of this Policy and it allows them an opportunity to be well equipped in their current jobs." R13 stated, "I see more and more people starting to develop themselves via the Assisted Education Policy. That to me says that people are beginning to realize that this Policy is here to assist them to achieve their goals." R15 focused more on the support by stating, "Education assistants provide personal care, behaviour management, and emotional and academic support. Because of this it is important for education assistants to encourage staff or workers to work towards life skills and independence." R16 focused more on consequences of not adhering to the provisions of the Policy and stated, "Assisted Education

Policy is well presented and creates full commitment by employee that should one not commit to his or her studies, he or she will be liable for the cost incurred for modules failed."

#### **Theme 5: Gaps in the Policy**

Respondents were asked to state what they saw as gaps in the Assisted Education Policy and the following were the gaps cited by respondents:

- There is lack of alignment between various Units in terms of implementation of the Policy.
- There is also lack of high-level guidance and career pathing that takes place at a wider level.
- Sometimes assisted education applications are rejected within a Unit because the Unit management cannot see the immediate benefit of that study in their branch that could help that person in another portfolio.
- It should be aligned to a career plan.
- There are no opportunities for employees once they have completed their studies.
- The Policy should be made known and more than one person should deal with queries.
- The Policy should be addressing the skills needs of the City and thus it should in a way be informed by the direction that the City wants to take.
- Delays in responding whether the application was successful or not.
- There is subjectivity or inconsistencies with line management approvals of assisted education within their respective Units.
- Prospective applicants should be provided more information about the Policy.
- The fact that when you fail a subject you must payback and it is only then that the City will resume your assisted education programme.
- It is taking stock of all these programs that employees are doing and incorporating or facilitating exposure programs for willing employees.
- Workers must be treated the same and all workers who are willing to study must be assisted.

- Research should also be granted study leave like examinations.
- The work back programme is difficult for employees working with projects with specific deliverables on specific dates.

### **Theme 6: Organisational Barriers Affecting Implementation**

Respondents were also asked about the barriers affecting implementation of the Policy R22 stated, “The performance appraisal process does not tie up with assisted education. Individuals who are studying should be allowed to list their work-related studies as work enhancements and therefore part of their appraisal. R32 stated, “Organisational culture- some staff members are not interested in learning, whilst others are focused and want to study but line managers do not support them. We need to create a positive mindset around learning, shared organisational vision, engaged employees and inclusive workforce including those at the lowest level to study and this should be linked to a career plan.”R4 stated, “Superiors and budget limitations. The Policy allows all employees who want to study to apply, however the implementation is not as easy as it is stated in the Policy.” R6 looked at from the strategy point of view and stated, “The organisation does not have any clear vision and strategy that is communicated and thus there is no clear staff development response that speaks to that vision.” R12 was very critical of other policies and stated, “It is other policies-rigid policies-that make it hard for employees to move from one area to another. Most HR policies dictate that one must have experience of a number of years. What is frustrating is that even the current experience is not considered because it is in a different field.”R13 criticised management and stated, “Some other managers need to be taught too not to be stumbling blocks of their staff when it comes to training and development of staff.” R28 focused more on technology limitations and stated, “Those studying require technology facilities like a LAN at a designated space or area where access to the internet and computer will not be restricted bearing in mind that not everyone who is on assisted education can afford to buy computers and have access to unlimited data. Also, those doing research will require access to journals and library information and as such, some journals or publications should be made accessible to those who are registered to study or those who

research for work purposes. The Assisted Education Department should also assist students with their research, especially where the study is about the municipal department and therefore requiring information about the department or where the survey is required from employees in which the study is related to that particular department.”R42 stated that there are budget limitations when it comes to training and development of employees.

### **Theme 7: Recommended solutions to barriers**

Respondents recommended the following to address organisational barriers that affect the implementation of the Assisted Education Policy:

- Assisted Education staff should do the road shows or webinars together with Skills Development Practitioners (SDPs) educating employees about the Policy.
- Reward and recognise staff who successfully complete their assisted education.
- The application process should be centralised and employees should apply directly to the Academy so as to eliminate subjectivity and inconsistencies by line departments.
- Over and above the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) the organisation should have a live document that speaks to its direction and the type of skills that it requires to achieve that direction.
- There has to be synergy and alignment of all policies across the City.
- Management should understand that training and development of their employees is a recipe for a good long lasting and fruitful relationship between management and staff.
- The Academy should negotiate with universities discounted tuition should a number of employees be interested in a certain programme.
- A research room should be created and should have a database of those who have studied through Assisted Education to assist those who only

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come to do the course after them as mentors.

- Budget for training and development should be increased across the City.

### Theme 8: Provisions of the Policy that promote retention of employees

Respondents were also asked to state those Policy provisions that would retain them in the City, and they stated the following:

- The funding option, although reduced, it is a key factor to retention.
- It is the study leave and financial support.
- The fact that one can pursue studies in one's field and the kind of support received from Assisted Education staff during the process of registration for studies.
- It is great that the Policy allows employees to study Masters and PHD degrees.
- Time given to attend lectures/classes/sessions/block release/research.
- The Policy gives every employee an opportunity to develop, it does not discriminate.
- It is a good Policy overall.
- Service obligation after completion of studies.

### Theme 9: Recommended improvement in the Policy

When asked to recommend the improvements in the Assisted Education Policy, respondents stated the following:

- Applications should be made electronically for fast and effective response.
- Create an interlinked system in terms of posts, that will prioritise employees who have benefitted from assisted education.
- Introduce mentors to ensure that employees complete qualifications within the prescribed time.
- The Policy should accommodate study material if budget allows.

- Money should be deducted from the employee's pension if he or she resigns.
- The Policy should cover a greater spectrum of qualifications.

### Theme 10: Recommendations to promote the culture of learning and development in the municipality

Respondents were also asked to recommend what should be done by the City to promote the culture of learning and development and the following are some of their responses:

- To promote the individuals who take time to study.
- Have career days and pop-up sessions in different Units.
- Each Unit must have a "Community of Practice" where there is continuous engagement and sharing of ideas and knowledge.
- Have competitions, posters and EMA success magazine.
- The City should promote internal employees who have been developed through assisted education rather than recruiting external employees.
- There should be greater communication and awareness about the benefits of development.
- Publicise the number of employees developed per year.
- Have a graduation ceremony for all those who have completed their studies.
- Making education a catalyst for cultural change in the organisation.
- Create a platform for people who benefitted from assisted education to have a good story to tell.
- Start by promoting a culture of recognising skilled, educated and capable internal staff by giving them more responsibilities.
- More workshops (Master classes) targeting senior management to make them aware of the development of employees

## FINDINGS

The following are the findings of the study:

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- Employees (respondents) applied for assisted education for purposes of expanding their academic and professional knowledge and also for career prospects or promotion opportunities within the municipality.
- The municipality currently pays tuition and also provides study and examination leave as part of its support to employees who are part of the assisted education programme.
- Employees (respondents) request the municipality to provide additional support in the form of books and stationery, data and more leave days.
- Successes of the Policy include productive, knowledgeable and marketable employees who have gone through assisted education.
- Gaps in the Policy include lack of alignment with other policies of the municipality in terms of implementation and inconsistent application of the Policy by management.
- Organisational barriers include lack of coordination with other processes such as Talent Management, Performance Management, Rewards and Recognition and Succession Planning.
- Recommended solutions include centralisation of the application process within the Academy and that the training budget be increased for the benefit of more employees.
- The assisted education programme does retain employees.
- The major improvement required is to digitize the application process (electronic applications).
- Alignment of the Assisted Education Policy with other municipal policies.
- Coordination and alignment of the assisted education programme with other processes such as Talent Management, Performance Management, Rewards and Recognition and Succession Planning.
- Centralisation and digitisation of the application process.
- Staging career days and graduation ceremonies to promote the culture of learning and development.

### CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to qualitatively evaluate the effectiveness of the Assisted Education Policy of eThekweni Municipality. Literature review focused on the changing workplace; knowledge workers; employee retention strategies; training and development programmes, components of training and development programmes; employee benefits from development; legislative provisions for skills development in South Africa and eThekweni Municipality Assisted Education Policy. The study used a questionnaire and 50 respondents who are recipients of assisted education programme were selected as the sample. Questions focused on 10 themes which are reasons for applying for assisted education; current support from the municipality; recommended support for the municipality; successes of the Policy; gaps in the Policy; organisational barriers affecting implementation ; recommended solutions to barriers; provisions of the Policy that promote retention of employees; recommended improvement in the Policy and recommendations to promote the culture of learning and development in the municipality. The study revealed that employees apply for assisted education to improve knowledge and promotion prospects; the Policy has produced productive, knowledgeable and marketable employees; there is lack of coordination with other processes such as Talent Management, Performance Management, Rewards and Recognition and Succession Planning and that the assisted education programme does retain employees.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are some of the recommendations by the respondents:

- The municipality should provide opportunities for promotion to assisted education recipients.
- Employees who are supported through the assisted education programme to be given books, data, stationery and more leave days.

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